

"CHALMERS, Glen"
[Redacted]
05/07/2017 11:49 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire Service Bill Select Committee
Submission

1 attachment



Submission.docx

To whom it may concern,

Please find attached a copy of my confidential submission to the Fire Service Bill Select Committee .

Regards,

Glen Chalmers
MFB Leading Fire Fighter

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4th July 2017

Fire Service Bill Select Committee

Glen Chalmers
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]**RE: Submission to the Fire Services Bill Select Committee. Confidential.**

Dear Committee members,

My name is Glen Chalmers, I am a proud MFB career fire fighter. I am a former Police Officer and Teacher.

I wish to make a **confidential** submission to this committee. This submission is my own views and does not necessarily represent the views of the MFB board or management.

I categorically welcome the reform legislation as it has been presented.

The fire service reform means that a new committee can take urban development, population growth and call outs into consideration and make recommendations to the fire commissioner about the appropriateness of volunteer only or FRV response. To me that is sensible and takes the politics and the fiefdoms out of what should be an objective decision about our public safety.

Career fire fighters are not greedy, conceited, bullies, militant, thugs, or misogynists as the media and some people would try to paint us, we are normal people committed to serving our community. I personally have been badly affected by the constant negative press we have been subjected to in the media. If this reform does not proceed, the fire services will miss the boat for reform for another generation or more, and that would be a tragedy.

I have met some very competent volunteers who serve the community with a selfless regard, and whom I respect. I think that volunteers do a great job in **rural** and **country** areas, however, I have a real concern that the volunteering model in built up urban environments is dangerous to career and volunteer staff, and the community who may not be aware that they are at risk. The differences between fires in structures and fires in the bush are stark.

Problems with the volunteering model in an urban environment.

1. Volunteer response does not adequately address the time critical nature of calls in built up areas. Car accidents, industrial accidents, entrapments, fires involving rescues, chemical spills, emergency medical situations and many more. Seconds count. There are no points for trying or good intentions.

FRV would ensure Emergency Medical Response is brought to urban areas that have not had coverage. Fire fighters from the MFB have saved the lives of over 280 people due to their medical response and intervention. The expanded EMR capability in FRV will undoubtedly save more lives. Due to the time critical nature of EMR, volunteers could never be used for EMR response. The current population in outer urban CFA volunteer areas are being short changed as they can only rely on the ambulance paramedics who may be far away or busy at hospital.

2. If a house is on fire, seconds count. Water on a fire within 7.7 minutes or the fire flashes over and involves the whole structure. If I get to a house or factory on fire first and people may be missing, I go in to do a search for them. I am comforted by the knowledge that the next truck will be only seconds behind me so if the roof collapses or I get trapped I will have at least two fire fighters in Breathing Apparatus that can pull me out.

That is not the case for the CFA or MFB professionals when turning out with volunteers. When the professional crews get on scene they may have a long wait for the volunteers to arrive. Will they arrive? CFA's own data says no, not always. Will they have the specific training to help in that scenario? Not necessarily. Maybe they aren't BA qualified, maybe they're not structure fire qualified, maybe they are not multiple level qualified. That leaves the professional staff in an unsafe situation. That is why 7 on the fireground is so important and what FRV legislation delivers.

3. The pager system of 'turning out' volunteers is unreliable. A volunteer with Bayswater recently told me and others that she got paged at 3 in the morning, but she didn't respond because it was 'just a washaway' (car accident), but when she woke up later and checked the pager again it was actually for a car accident at 6 pm the day before. So either the pager went off 11 hours late or she misread it and didn't respond. What happened to the car accident? Did anybody respond?

It is well known that volunteers are not always available. At work, dropping kids at school, supermarket shopping, in the middle of something, too tired, have to work tomorrow, the list goes on. How can this ever be a reliable

service? Throw in to the mix the training or qualifications of the people that do respond. Does the crew have a driver? Can they drive code 1 (lights and sirens)? Do they have a captain or lieutenant? Do they have BA (Breathing apparatus) training? External or internal? Multi-storey?

I have been to a 'Fire Alarm operating' with CFA Chirnside Park Pumper at Harvey Norman in Chirnside Park, who arrived sometime later with a crew of one - the driver. That was it. Luckily, it was not a fire.

I have been to a garage fire while at Templestowe and have a 'slip on' (a ute with a plastic water tank) arrive with two volunteer crew. No BA or BA qualification, no useful equipment. They were the only ones to respond from their station and neither could drive the pumper anyway.

FRV would assist in closing the service delivery gap between urban MFB and urban CFA response. Why should residents in Bayswater, Scoresby etc be at greater risk than those in Croydon, Vermont, Glen Waverley?

4. There are no "move-ups" in the CFA. In the MFB, if there is a fire or incident that will delay a truck from responding to another incident in the area for 15 mins or more another truck from another station that has a spare will 'move up' and cover the area. This gives the public a great level of assurance that if another incident occurs, another truck will respond quickly. On the other hand, if Rowville and Boronia respond to a gas leak for example and will be on the scene for longer than 15 mins, there is NO 'move up', which means that Rowville, Scoresby, Boronia, etc are ONLY protected by a volunteer response, which may be delayed or failed to respond. If FRV was in place, a move up could be called into those stations from Ringwood, Croydon etc. Thus, giving a highly built up suburb the urban protection it needs.
5. Modern building materials, and items in our homes and business are much more flammable than in years past. Flash over is likely to occur within 7.7 minutes in an average structure. A volunteer response is extremely unlikely to respond quickly enough to stop a fire spreading from the room of origin. Modern building materials like laminated chipboard / ply beams lose their strength once under fire, making the likelihood of a structural collapse much more likely. Thus a fast response is the only way to protect life and property. These dodgy building products are present in greater concentrations in the outer urban areas particularly in new developments.



6. Station turnout boundaries and response criteria are being dictated by individual station captains. For example, Bayswater volunteers dislike the fact that Boronia career staff are always 'beating them' to calls in their patch, so they tried to stop Boronia career staff from being responded in their area. When the Emergency Medical Response trial came to Boronia career staff, the Bayswater volunteers blocked Boronia career staff from responding into their area. To be clear, to stop CFA career staff from performing vital CPR, oxygen and defibrillation to people in cardiac arrest!

There is also the ongoing dispute between Chirnside Park volunteers and the Lilydale Volunteers. All about protecting their own patch, and who has shown support for career staff, at the absolute expense of the community who just want the nearest fire trucks to respond as quickly as possible.

South Warrandyte recently became an integrated station to a large degree because there were not sufficient volunteers to respond reliably, and the captain has supported the CFA make it an integrated station. This is a positive move but REACTIONARY. The Government's reform, is an example of being PROACTIVE and investigating and monitoring geographical areas which need a career response in the best interests and SAFETY of the community.

7. **Accountability.** Volunteers are not held accountable for their own turn out area. Career trucks are monitored via GPS and are required to remain in their turnout areas or have arranged a move up. What happens to public safety when trucks from volunteer stations are driven to other areas for meetings, training or even political demonstrations in the city? Who is left to respond in their response area and in what truck? FRV could alleviate these scenarios so if a volunteer truck(s) are out of their area for a legitimate purpose FRV trucks and crews could move up and cover their response areas.

Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria:

The fire service delivery of FRV and CFA volunteers would be **huge** improvement to the status quo, through accountability, reliable, fast response, EMR, Move-ups, and having a data led decision making process.

For the first time, the best minds from the CFA and MFB would be in the same organisation, sharing ideas and working towards the same goals. This could only benefit productivity, effectiveness, and community safety.

Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery:

No volunteer is prevented or discouraged from volunteering. Training of volunteers is protected. There is more money to help promote, train and equip volunteers.

Volunteer engagement has already been affected by the political misinformation being peddled, and must stop.

Any volunteer who suggests they would leave are either exaggerating for political reasons or volunteering for the wrong reasons. The essential question should be: ***What is the appropriate first response, volunteer or career in a given area to protect life and property?*** If that means a career truck is brought in and the volunteers need to be the second truck out the door, then so be it.

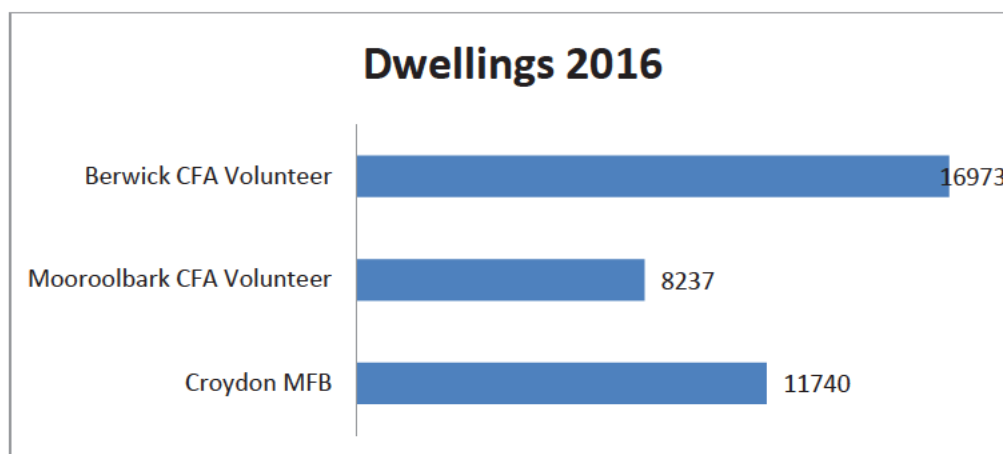
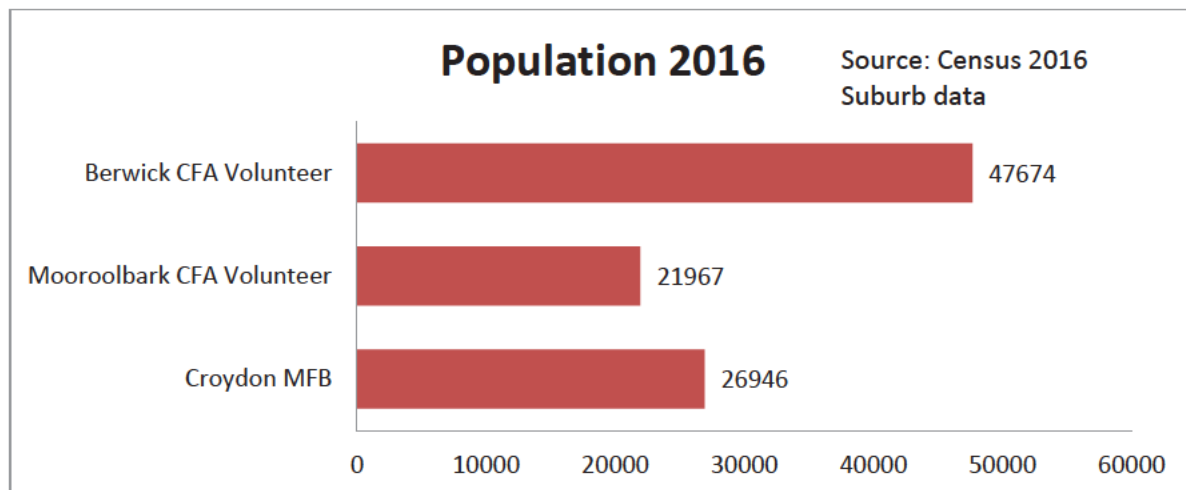
Short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision

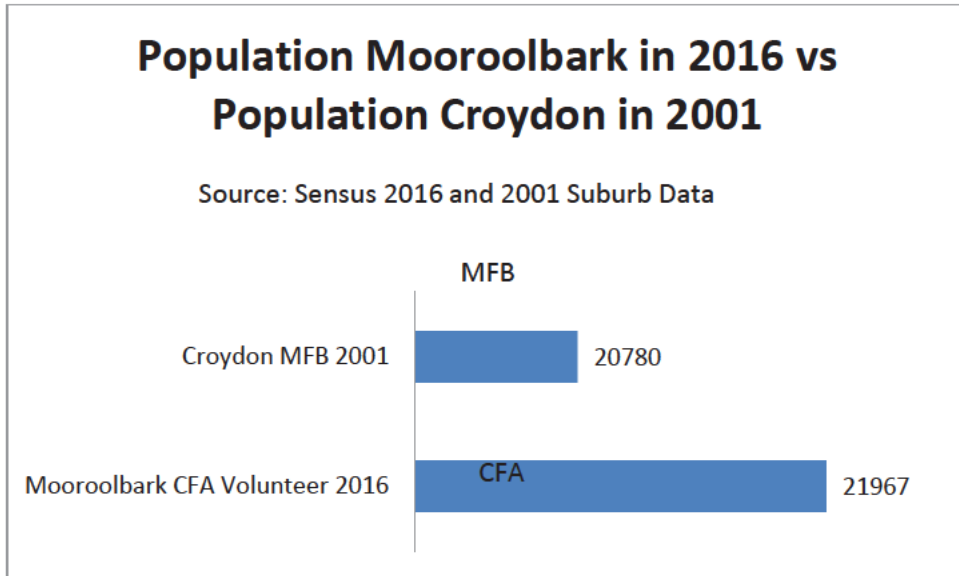
- There are lots of efficiencies that can be created at the administration level by combining MFB and CFA career staff.
- The fire service levy already generates more revenue than is spent on fire services. Up to 300 million more.
- The greater the population and number of dwellings in an area the greater the revenue for fire service delivery, so as suburbs grow so does the revenue for career fire protection.
- Many of the costs have already been made. Eg standard recruit training for all career fire fighters, procurement of standardised equipment.

Underlying policy rationale;

- MFB and CFA have been anticipating the merger of career staff for years
- Eg, standardising equipment, uniform, standardising training. 2017 is the first recruit course that doesn't differentiate between MFB and CFA.
- An unequal level of service delivery and risk reduction for the community has been allowed to develop over decades. FRV is a step in the right direction.
- Public safety and fire fighter safety will vastly be improved with FRV.
- FRV is scalable, resources for public safety based on turn outs, population growth and urban development. The current model is static and antiquated.
- Every other state in Australia, has a fire fighting service model like the FRV model, for good reason.

The following charts from 2016 and 2001 census data give an example of the inequity in the status quo arrangements.





The residents of Croydon have enjoyed the benefits of a MFB career response for over half a century. In 2016, there are more residents of Mooroolbark than Croydon had back in 2001, but still do not receive a career fire fighter response.

The population of Berwick has grown by 53% since 2001, well outpacing average population growth in the state, yet it still is not covered by a career fire fighter response except a truck from Narre Warren. And to add insult, the residents are paying double in the fire service levy.

Unless there is a dedicated committee investigating urban growth, development and call outs like this legislation provides, how will anyone have the information for good decision making?

To conclude this submission I would say that I value the volunteer’s efforts and sacrifices, and I understand that professional crews cannot nor should not replace the volunteer brigade contribution to public safety, however, there are areas in this state due to the change in infrastructure and population density simply must have reform to keep the risk to fire fighters and the public to the absolute minimum.

To do nothing and vote down this reform would allow the current dysfunction to continue, and put lives at risk.

Sincerely,

Glen Chalmers