



"Peter Closter"

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF  
 cc [REDACTED]  
 bcc [REDACTED]  
 Subject Submission from Peter Closter for  
 Firefighters Presumptive Rights  
 Compensation and Legislation

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

My name is Peter Closter, I am a Station Officer at the Altona fire station working for the MFB. I commenced employment with the MFB as a fire fighter on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1983, 34 years ago. In 1988 I was promoted to Senior Fire Fighter and then in 1989 to Station Officer after completing the appropriate courses associated with these positions. Since this time I have been a Station Officer in the Western district B platoon, working at Altona, Laverton, Laverton North, Deer Park, Spotswood, Newport, Footscray, St Albans, Taylors Lakes and Westmeadows. I have lived my whole life in Werribee, currently at [REDACTED], and at this time I am stationed at Altona fire station. I would also like to add my initial involvement in fire services began in 1977 as a volunteer at my local CFA station in Werribee, in my 8 year career at the Werribee CFA station I began as a junior fire fighter and soon became an active uniform member. It is due to these experiences I believe I can supply important information regarding the two services.

Firstly, I would like to point out that I believe the volunteers do a great job and should be commended for their service, I cherish my time at the CFA and am thankful that it showed me that I wanted to pursue a career in full time fire fighting. However, now that I have more experience and knowledge as a full time station officer I would like to table this submission as to why these 35 highly urbanised areas should have career staff and the reasons behind that. When I joined the CFA, within two weeks of joining I was catching first response fire appliances as a volunteer with very little basic training, in hind sight now, I can see the dangers this could have caused to myself, crew members and the community. At the same time when driving to the local station in my own vehicle I acknowledge that I broke the speed limit and at some times drove recklessly to get to the station quicker to catch the gear when responding, again, I look at this now and can see the dangers associated with this behaviour. I also can remember times when a crew could not be mustered to dispatch a fire appliance for alarm of fire due to lack of crew or lack of driver. In my time with the CFA I observed a culture of protecting their own area, this would involve officers in the Werribee CFA turning out in their private car or even at times on a motorbike and booking on scene at an alarm of fire to show a quicker response time then when the first primary appliance arrived. I was also encouraged to book appliances on scene before their arrival to show a quicker response time, this again, having the experience I have now, I can see the dangers associated with this. Furthermore, in regards to this culture I was also taught at all costs not to let career staff fire fighters be allowed to give support inside CFA area. I would like to give some examples of the Werribee CFA returning MFB career staffed appliances at alarm of fires.

Approximately 10 years ago, I was at No. 46 Altona fire station, we were turned out to a workshop fire at Ballan Holden, Princes Hwy Werribee, and at approximately half distance to the site both pumper taker 40 and 46 were advised they were not required therefore, myself and pumper tanker 46 returned to the station at the next intersection. However, pumper tanker 40 who were much closer than us,

turned around at the front of Ballan Holden and noticed dense black smoke pouring from the building and no CFA appliance on scene. A Werribee CFA officer, who was on scene in his private car tasked pumper tanker 40 to get to work even though over the radio we were advised that we were not required.

Another example, approximately 5 years ago the abandoned Glen Devon Primary School caught fire and pumper tanker 40 and 46 were despatched to assist CFA. On arrival, I approached the incident controller, Mr Darrell Wells, and asked him what he would like us to do, he requested pumper tanker 46 to move up to Hoppers Crossing fire station and pumper tanker 40 to move up to Werribee fire station. I questioned his decision and said that we have two appliances with six trained fire fighters here now, why would you want to send us away from the fire and move up to the two stations, which he replied with that on second thoughts we did not require your support, you can return to your own station, which we did. While returning to our respective stations I then heard Darrell Wells call for two further CFA appliances. Once back at the station I then lodged a complaint to my superior regarding this incident to Commander Darren Conlan in which I believe the situation was reported to the CFA. There have been many instances of this similar situation occurring in my time as an MFB officer when responding into Werribee CFA area, where the CFA have placed a higher importance on protecting their own area, over community safety.

As an experienced station officer I cannot stress enough the importance of having seven properly trained fire fighters despatched on scene within eight minutes of alarm of fire. It appears to be politically incorrect for me to say that career staff are trained to a higher level than volunteers however, I believe this to be true. This is due to a MFB career fire fighter recruit course requiring twelve weeks full time training, on shift training as a fire fighter, nine weeks full time training to become a senior fire fighter and then additionally, twelve weeks full time training to become a station officer, also with on shift week to week training. There is no comparison from the CFA in terms of training when these two processes are placed side by side, however, in saying this I would also like to acknowledge that my CFA training was a long time ago.

In closing, I would just like to say that these experiences are my own and involve Werribee CFA and myself as a station officer in MFB bordering stations namely Laverton and Altona. I plead that this committee takes on board these submissions and puts in place the changes needed to the two fire services to transform us into a modern system that is beneficial and safer for both fire fighters and the community. Additionally, I would like to note the strain and stress that the last two and a half years in particular has caused for myself and my family due to negative/false media reports, EB negotiations and uncertain review implementations. This is extended to the point where I have had to engage a psychologist for my own personal wellbeing.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions at this email or my mobile number below.

Yours sincerely,  
Peter Closter

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