



[REDACTED]
07/07/2017 03:42 PM

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

1 attachment



fire_reform_submission_[REDACTED].pdf

To whom it may concern.

Please find my submission regarding the fire service reform legislation currently before the select committee attached to this email.

Could you please ensure that my identity is kept confidential.

Thank you, [REDACTED]



Honourable members of the fire services bill select committee,

My name is [REDACTED], I am a leading fire fighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. I have served the communities of Victoria in my role as a professional fire fighter for nearly 13 years. Prior to my appointment as a fire fighter with the M.F.B. I was a volunteer with the C.F.A. at Bayswater fire brigade for approximately 7 years. I was also employed by the C.F.A., working in operations support and project work positions for approximately 4 years.

I am writing this submission regarding the fire services reform in the hope I can emphasise how imperative it is to provide the communities of Victoria with a modern smoothly functioning service they expect and need, regardless of where they live. I write this with the experiences of both a volunteer and professional fire fighter perspective.

Bayswater fire brigade is undoubtedly a very busy brigade, and has been for many, many years. I remember numerous times as a volunteer being placed in a position where we as a brigade were unable to respond due to a lack of response from brigade members. I remember times when we would respond 2 firefighters on an appliance to house fires and alarms simply because our members had work or other commitments that made them unavailable.

It still happens today, not much has changed in the 13 years since I have been involved with Bayswater. On the 28th of June at 23:28 Bayswater failed to respond to a car accident with possible entrapment, please see attached evidence. This is not the fault of the volunteers, it a failing of a system that is applying too much pressure to volunteers that are, in reality over worked in their volunteer capacity. The failure to responds are an all too common occurrence. I live in Upwey, and on a regular basis Upwey, Belgrave, Upper Ferntree Gully, Sassafras Ferny Creek and Scoresby fire brigades fail to respond, respond late or respond with inappropriate resources and skills to service the community in which I live.

All too often I hear from C.F.A. professional fire fighter colleagues in Rowville and other areas about how they had no backup for up to 20 minutes while waiting for support form the next responding volunteer brigade. This is not what the community expect or deserve.

The systems as it stands is broken, it is failing fire fighters and it is failing the community. Providing a model of fire cover that enables communities to have the best possible fire cover is what is required. Basing a model of fire cover on black and white facts, without interference of local views clouded by personal beliefs and agendas will ensure the community is protected and will ensure that fire fighters both professional and volunteer will be able to carry out their roles as efficiently and as safely as possible.

The proposed reforms will re-establish an independent review of fire service delivery / boundaries, in the event of an issue with service delivery arising local brigades will be consulted and feedback taken on board relating what support they need as a brigade to help them carry out their legislated responsibility's. Support offered maybe (but not limited to) assistance with volunteer recruitment or volunteer retention. If one of those two avenues of support help to resolve the issues faced by the brigade then this is an excellent result for the community and for the brigade. However, if issues cannot be resolved support must be provided via other means to ensure the community has a level of protection they expect along with local volunteers being supported in their role.

Due to the abolishment of the fire boundary review panel many decades ago the boundaries have not changed since the metropolitan fire district was established. This district extended to around 15 miles from the GPO, the metropolitan district has obviously encroached into areas that were once farm land and orchards and in rural centres we are also seeing an explosion in population with demand for timely fire service response being outstripped demand. It is time to address this, it is time to provide the community with the protection they deserve, the community do not care what badge is on the truck or uniform.

But unfortunately measures to enhance community and fire fighter protection have been hobbled by unrelenting scaremongering being circulated throughout the media. Unsubstantiated talk about how this will negatively impact on fire service delivery and that volunteers will leave the C.F.A. is wrong, at its worst a pre meditated lie. Much of the evidence about negative impacts is based solely on emotion, gut feeling and the vibe of it. Volunteers will not leave the C.F.A. Generally local brigades and volunteers have their communities' best interests at heart and a vast majority see through the negative and deliberately divisive campaign. A result of the new legislation before parliament is that Volunteers will be provided with support to carry out their roles, support that they do not currently have. They will be provided funding that will be used to help enhance training, infrastructure, equipment and most importantly volunteer recruitment and retention. The greatest beneficiaries of this will be the community and those volunteers who deliver their service to the community.

Much of the anti-professional campaign has been many years in the making, with the VFBV and the Liberal party pedalling lies and rumours about how enterprise agreements will impact on the role of volunteers. No enterprise agreement and no negotiations have impacted on the ability for volunteers to respond to fires and other emergency's thus far. In a letter (attached within this submission) dated 20th July 2006 then chairman of the VFBV Gary Little kept the fear of volunteers being undermined and devalued alive, since 2006 this has not happened yet we still see the same untruths being circulated. Unfortunately, many brigades have been caught up in the lies and hysteria and have been a party to the unbearable climate we are now in.

On Saturday the 2nd of July 2017, the federal election. Ex-Captian of Upwey fire brigade Peter Marke stated at a public gathering, accompanied by Andrew Ford that Upwey fire brigade needs to maintain its "right" to protect Upwey. Unfortunately, due to an ideological dislike of professional fire fighters and suspicion of change they have not been able to maintain this "right" as Mr Marke calls it.

The level of distrust and hatred for professional fire fighters that the VFBV and Liberal party have generated has now spilled over and is unfortunately beginning to compromise community safety. Recently I have had to say to my family that if there is a fire in our house we may or may not get a quick enough response to save a loved one or our home. It is a terrible thing to say that Upwey have deliberately excluded Rowville professional staff from responding into their response area, they are just 10 minutes down the road. On the 23rd of March 2017 Upwey and Belgrave both failed to respond, Rowville were left sitting in their station. An appliance from Rowville would have arrived on scene before any other appliance and in this instance may have been able to minimise further injury and property damage.

On the 22nd of June 2017 Ferntree Gully failed to respond, they also failed to respond over subsequent days to at least 2 other calls for assistance from the community.

Irregularities and issues inconsistent with community safety will be able to be addressed under the new legislation without the bias of local brigade and individual opinions on professional staff. Our business both volunteer and professional is community safety.

In conclusion I ask of you to examine the facts surrounding the current state of fire service delivery in the state of Victoria, put the community first and give them the best possible fire protection.

I thank you for your time.

Yours faithfully, [REDACTED]

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20th July 2006



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Dear Captain/Secretary/Group Officer/Group Secretary,

You will be aware that CFA has been negotiating an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) with the UFU for over 12 months. This EBA contains clauses that seriously impact on the autonomy of CFA to make decisions, including some related to the relationship between CFA and its volunteers. On this basis, and because it undermines the statutory responsibilities of the CFA Board, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Officer, the CFA Board has refused to sign the agreement.

Volunteers in Victoria are very concerned with the implications of this EBA on CFA's ability to support them in providing the highest level of emergency services to Victorian communities. As such, we have unanimously supported the CFA Board's position in refusing to sign this agreement.

At a mass meeting held in Melbourne last week, volunteers agreed that action must be taken to increase public awareness of the threat to our capacity to do our job, and agreed to stage a public rally within the next few weeks; we have deferred this rally for the reasons mentioned below.

Since this meeting, VFBV has set up a Task Force with representatives of rural and urban volunteer associations to draw public attention to this issue. We believe that to be successful, a public campaign needs to be carefully developed and coordinated to ensure that the right messages are reaching the right people at the right time. Accordingly, we have developed a multi-pronged strategy which will be implemented over a sustained period and which will culminate in a major rally in Melbourne involving a greater number of our volunteers.

This strategy will have a local and regional focus, and will be expanded on a State-wide basis to highlight what VFBV sees as issues most affecting fire protection services to Victoria. Our campaign will include media, meetings with MPs, and mass public rallies. Within the next few days we will be appointing five volunteer coordinators at each Region. Their role will be to make sure all activities are coordinated and that we speak with one united voice. With 100 coordinators supported by 58,000 volunteers, we will send a strong message that this situation must never arise again.

We will let you know details of this arrangement shortly, and details of how you can help.

In the meantime, it is important you understand that the issue we have with the EBA is not a campaign against our career firefighters. In fact, we strongly support their rights to negotiate pay and conditions of employment. We are all professionals, and we must continue to work as a team with our career firefighters to achieve the best outcomes for public safety. It is important that we maintain our professionalism and avoid being led into any reaction that may undermine the relationship with our career staff and CFA's overall operational effectiveness.

Could you please ensure that all members of your Brigade receive a copy of this letter or are fully briefed on what will be a major campaign in reinforcing the vital role of volunteers within CFA.

Gary Lyttle AFSM
 Chairman

